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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 005155

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [UNGA](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [GOI](#) [INTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: FM SHALOM TELLS A/S WELCH THAT ISRAELIS MUST SEE
BENEFITS FROM DISENGAGEMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: In an August 17 meeting, FM Silvan Shalom told Assistant Secretary Welch and the Ambassador that disengagement is proceeding better than expected, but still carries a heavy price for Likud politicians. Shalom expressed concern that Palestinian extremists could launch attacks against Israel, necessitating severe Israeli responses. He advocated a return to the roadmap, with the caveat that Israel would first need to see "full implementation" from the Palestinians. Shalom repeatedly stressed the need for Israelis to see concrete benefits from disengagement, and suggested the need for positive statements by the USG, the Quartet, and the UN, as well as improvement in Arab-Israeli relations. Turning to Iran, Shalom urged the United States and EU-3 to address Tehran's nuclear program in the UNSC during September. He also noted the importance that Israel places on resuming a strategic dialogue with the USG. END SUMMARY.

Disengagement, Security and the Roadmap

2. (C) Although he admitted that disengagement "looks much better than I predicted," Shalom said that Likud ministers and politicians who support disengagement are paying a heavy price. He predicted that early general elections would probably take place in March 2006, preceded by party primaries. He cautioned that public disillusionment could mean "another ten years" before someone with Sharon's ability would emerge and move the peace process forward. A/S Welch noted that the USG has strongly supported the disengagement process and has worked to ensure that the GOI and President Abbas get full credit for the positive developments.

3. (C) A/S Welch said the USG believes that a successful disengagement policy can leave Gaza more open, more prosperous, more free and more secure. He said that he and General Ward stressed the importance of security -- describing it as "the beginning, the middle, and the end" -- during their August 16 meeting in Gaza with Interior Minister Nasir Yusif and PA security chiefs. Shalom expressed concern that President Mahmoud Abbas has failed to rein in militants and that weapons could flow easily into Gaza from Egypt and the future Gaza port. He said that Hamas, which he claimed should be prohibited by the Oslo Accords from taking part in PA elections, could win 35-40 percent of the vote in January. If the extremists put their threats of violence into action, for example, by launching rockets at Ashqelon, Shalom predicted a quick swing in Israeli public opinion leading to sweeping political changes in Israel. Such a "catastrophe" would also result in "Defensive Shield III," i.e., the return of Israeli troops to Gaza.

4. (C) Shalom reported to the Israeli Cabinet that the GOI will face international pressure to move quickly on the peace process once disengagement is complete. He told A/S Welch that Israel's willingness to do so is dependent upon how disengagement proceeds (i.e., if there are casualties) and on what the Palestinians do on the day after. Pointing to large gaps in the PA and GOI positions on refugees and Israel, he cautioned against any attempt to address final status issues. Instead, he advocated a return to the roadmap, with the caveat that Israel would first need to see "full implementation" from the Palestinians. He accused the Palestinians of "doing nothing" to fulfill their obligation to act against extremists. A/S Welch noted the importance of the GOI's commitment to the roadmap, saying it protects Israel's own interests. Shalom replied that many Likud members do not believe this to be the case.

Israeli Public Must See Benefits from Disengagement

5. (C) Throughout the meeting Shalom emphasized the importance of showing Israelis that there are benefits to disengagement. He reiterated his request for USG assistance in urging Arab countries to "embrace Israel." Shalom suggested that there was "never a better time" for Arab countries to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, or -- in the case of Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar and Oman -- to publicly reestablish their ties. He noted that several Arab

leaders have stated that they plan to visit Gaza. A/S Welch responded that the USG actively encourages closer Arab-Israeli ties.

16. (C) Shalom said the GOI is looking for international support, adding "we deserve it ... we need it." He suggested that the President's speech at the UNGA might be an appropriate venue to make a positive statement and express understanding of how difficult disengagement has been for Israel. Chief of Staff Jacob Dayan asked if the Quartet could issue positive language. Director General Ron Prosor explained that the GOI believes it will be easier for others to praise disengagement if they can refer to a Quartet statement.

Shalom: Bring Iran to the UNSC in September

17. (C) Shalom stressed that September is the time to speak with the Europeans and bring Iran's nuclear program to the UNSC. He claimed that Israeli and American officials agree that Iran could achieve independent research and development for uranium enrichment within four to six months, even though there is disagreement on how quickly Iran could use this knowledge to construct nuclear weapons. A/S Welch noted the importance of maintaining unity among the Europeans and on including the IAEA in the process.

Request for a Strategic Dialogue

18. (C) Using Iran as an example, Shalom noted the importance that Israel places on resuming a strategic dialogue with the USG. A/S Welch acknowledged that Amb. Ayalon had raised the issue in Washington and assured Shalom that the request was being seriously considered by senior officials.

19. (U) NEA A/S Welch has cleared this message.

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